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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KHARTOUM 001691

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR AF A/S FRAZER, S/E WILLIAMSON, AF/SPG, AF/C
NSC FOR PITTMAN AND HUDSON
ADDIS ABABA FOR USAU

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TAGS: [ASEC](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KPKO](#) [UN](#) [AU](#) [SU](#)

SUBJECT: UPSURGE IN FIGHTING IN NORTH DARFUR

REF: A. KHARTOUM 1669

[1](#)B. KHARTOUM 1651

[1](#)C. KHARTOUM 1614

[1](#)D. KHARTOUM 1588

Classified By: CDA Alberto M. Fernandez, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Rebel, UNAMID and NGO contacts confirmed fighting in and around Helif, North Darfur between November 18 and 20. SLA/AW commander Suleiman Marajane told emboffs that on November 20 his forces attacked a SAF position in Helif at 7:00 am. (Note: Helif was previously under the control of SLA/AW and Marajane's forces, but the SAF has captured this location and several others on North Darfur from the rebels in recent months. End note.) Subsequently, according to Marajane, two GOS Antonovs and two MI-24 attack helicopters bombed the villages surrounding Helif and destroyed them. Marajane reported that three civilians were killed, but later told the press that five of his fighters were killed. UNAMID and media sources reported roughly the same information, also based on calls with Marajane and even from SAF sources who confirmed bombing attacks against "bandits" and to guard convoys.

[1](#)2. (C) Khalil Tukras, a human rights lawyer and close embassy contact with expert knowledge of the area and close contact with the rebels, cautioned the Embassy against accepting the reports of civilian casualties at face value. He said that most civilians had left the area following fighting earlier in the week on November 18, and previous rounds of fighting over the last two months. UNAMID contacts reported SAF bombing of Marajane's positions outside Helif on November 18, in response to Marajane's attempts to recapture the town. Tukras told CDA Fernandez and polchief November 19 that Marajane and other rebel forces north of El Fasher are increasingly cornered and cut off from their supply routes based on aggressive SAF moves over the last two months deep into rebel territory. The SAF has effectively if temporarily cut rebels off from supplies arriving from Libya by controlling an arc of territory across north Darfur. SAF has also sought to control good wells and smugglers' markets that sustain the rebels, chiefly SLA/Unity, and SLA/AW (Marajane's forces) in central North Darfur state (JEM and SLA-MM being usually more closely situated nearer the Chadian border in North Darfur). Tukras said that in addition to Helif, the SAF has taken control of Jebel Eisa and El Hara, which were JEM re-supply and rest points when it made its bold May 2008 journey across Darfur and Kordofan to attack Omdurman. Tukras predicted that Helif, Kutum, and Mellit are likely to be continued flash points in the coming weeks as rebels seek to regain control of North Darfur.

[1](#)3. (C) Tukras characterized the rebels as being in an

increasingly weakened state, reliant at this point on attacks on SAF positions in order to steal weapons, ammunition, and other supplies. He said JEM is the only force capable of mounting a significant attack at this point, while the other rebels are mostly in a defensive mode. Tukras said that based on his information JEM has 80 vehicles just West of Jebel Eissa and could take this position back from the government in the coming weeks. He noted that Eritrea was less forthcoming in assistance to the rebels given the improvement of relations with Khartoum. The last major Libyan resupply for Darfuri rebels he was aware of had gone to SLA fighters from Eastern Jebel Marra in June - 15 vehicles. Chad had helped JEM but not all the rebels and in any case, Chad supplied the Darfuri rebels "not from its own sources, but from those of Libya or captured Chadian rebel stocks."

¶4. (C) UNAMID UNDSS officer Frazer King confirmed this information based on site visits to the areas, but told poloff November 20 that the SAF is overextended from its own supply chain in El Fasher and has taken positions that it cannot feasibly defend, therefore he expects continued fighting between the government and rebels, with the rebels recapturing some locations. King said he felt that UNAMID was taking too soft a position on the SAF military actions against rebels in recent weeks based on (in his opinion) false claims that the SAF is clearing the areas of bandits. King noted that there has been no decrease in banditry, therefore the SAF actions obviously had no impact on bandits but were in fact meant to consolidate government gains against the rebels.

¶5. (C) Tukras and UNAMID reported that 500 Arab militia

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previously located west of Kebkabiya have now relocated north of Kebkabiya at the request of the SAF, either to "keep them occupied" or in preparation for a new offensive. These are the "Jund Mazlum" (oppressed soldiers), former janjaweed paramilitaries, who feel mistreated by the GOS for having waged the regime's war in Darfur but not having been fully incorporated into the uniformed services with military officer ranks. The "Jund Mazlum" have actually taken up arms at times and attacked government forces over the past year. Tukras noted that this is an ongoing problem given the number of former Arab militia who have over the last year been incorporated into the SAF, the BIF (Border Intelligence Forces), or the CRP (Central Reserve Police) while neglecting some Arab militia such as these in Kebkabiya. UNAMID's Joint Mission Analysis Center (JMAC) director Colonel Serge Kuhn confirmed this information and speculated that the government will need to find a way to incorporate these forces into the army or "do something with them" to prevent them from permanently becoming a renegade force of their own.

¶6. (C) Comment: It is by now obvious that the government's "immediate and unconditional" cease-fire is meaningless until the international community and UNAMID can force a real cease-fire monitoring mechanism on it - and even then the government is likely to continue to attempt to make gains against the rebels until there is a comprehensive peace agreement. Just as it did during negotiations with the South, the regime will attempt to consolidate gains even while negotiating. Rebels will also seek to provoke SAF and to take advantage of over-extended supply lines. We are likely to witness an upsurge in fighting in North Darfur as a result, as increasingly desperate rebels attempt to retake positions from the government. The Arab militia located outside of Kebkabiya bears close scrutiny, as it could turn against the government if its demands for additional pay and official military ranks are not ultimately met. End comment. FERNANDEZ